

# SANParks joint intelligence operations leads to arrest of suspected poachers

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Anti-poaching patrol in Kruger.

South African National Parks (SANParks) today (10 December) said its Environmental Crime Investigation Unit (ECI) in collaboration with the South African Police Service (SAPS) Directorate of Priority Crime Investigations (DPCI), conducted a series of intelligence driven operations which led to the arrest of eight suspected poachers in October and November in villages adjacent to the Kruger National Park (KNP).

The suspects were arrested for illegal possession of firearms and ammunition after being found in possession of four high calibre rifles and live rounds. The suspects have appeared in court on various charges. They were arrested in and around Hazyview, Mpumalanga.

In Limpopo, just outside KNP's Punda Maria Gate, four additional suspects were apprehended after information was received from community members. The arrested suspects were found in possession of dried and cooked buffalo meat, poison, knives, shoes, snare cables, elephant droppings, elephant skins, elephant dried lips, a baboon's dried arm and wild animal bones.

The Managing Executive of KNP, Gareth Coleman, congratulated all the teams involved in the operation and commended community members who gave information which led to the successful operations.

SANParks has had notable successes this year in combatting poaching at the Kruger National Park, arresting about 20 poachers, according to their media releases. Preventing and arresting poachers in the 2-million-hectare park is a challenge for the 1 000 strong national anti-poaching force due to its size, mountain range, international borders and the park being a tourist destination.

Despite the successes, SANParks reported to parliament in May this year that the KNP is finding rhino carcasses and evidence of poachers in the park essentially every day of the week, with spikes occurring during weekends. "Since November, December last year and into 2021, this landscape and particularly Kruger National Park has been experiencing serious numbers of rhino poaching incidents," said Jo Shaw, the Africa Rhino Lead for WWF International Network at the beginning of May.

South Africa entering the fourth wave of the COVID pandemic may bring about tighter lockdown restrictions, once again lowering the number of poaching incidents in the KNP. Regardless, international demand from China, Vietnam, Laos and Yemen will see the number of poaching incidents rise once restrictions ease.